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The Call to Social Work: Life Stories. Craig Winston LeCroy

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Book Notes

Craig Winston Lecroy, *The Call to Social Work: Life Stories*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003. \$ 19.95 papercover.

In his book, "The Call to Social Work" Lecroy attempts to capture the essence of "real life" social work practice through the narratives of seasoned professionals. As the title indicates, the reader is given a sense of the life experiences that drew these individuals to the field of social work, and the values that keep them committed to the profession after years of practice. There is an abundance of first-hand accounts of the need to serve clients in various practice settings and the interventions used to help them. For those undergraduate students unfamiliar with the diversity of settings where social workers can be found, this text will serve as a good introduction to this heterogeneous profession. It will also help new students clarify their motivation to work in the field.

The "Call to Social Work" is a valuable contribution to the literature because it provides a descriptive and qualitative context to a variety of practice issues which is typically missing in most introductory textbooks. Each of the social worker's narratives contained in the book are three to four pages long and grouped into eight sections according to themes, such as "A Passion for Justice"; "A Healing Journey"; In Pursuit of Compassion. Those profiled in the book range from community organizers to protective service workers to psychiatric social workers. They explain the personal factors that led them to the field and describe particular episodes with clients that held special meaning or were particularly challenging. Of course, these were often one and the same. Most of all, the reader will be impressed by the realism of the accounts. Many, if not all, of the narratives could be used as starting points for student discussion groups about the dilemmas and difficulties that commonly arise for social workers, including what they do to avoid burnout and how function effectively in the face of the formidable challenges that characterize most practice settings.

Despite its obvious merits, *The Call to Social Work* in some respects falls short of its goal "to build a stronger bridge between the sterile academic discourse about social work and the day-to-day

practice of social work." The author chose to omit personal details of the individuals, so as "to let the story represent their own self-descriptions." This was a mistake since many of the workers failed to provide details about themselves and their practice, which would have given more depth to their stories. Often too much is left to reader's imagination. An author's introduction and summary for each profile would have been a nice addition, as would photos of the social workers and their practice settings. Despite these shortcomings, "The Call to Social Work" gives the reader a better understanding of the personal factors that propel individuals toward the vocation and keep them dedicated to a life of service, where, as one of the social workers summarized it: "We touch the triumph of the human spirit."

Richard M. Merelman, *Pluralism at Yale: The Culture of Political Science in America*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003. \$ 26.95 papercover.

In the 1950 and 1960s, the Department of Political Science at Yale University was staffed by intellectual luminaries including Robert Dahl, Charles Lindblom, Harold Lasswell and Karl Deutch to name but a few, and not surprisingly it was regarded as one of the best in the nation. Although its leading academics wrote on diverse topics such as political theory, opinion polling and administrative science, they were all identified with the theory of pluralism which had evolved at Yale to offer a benign and optimistic view of the American political process. The theory of pluralism fostered a conceptual image of the government of the United States as little more than an arbiter of democracy which encouraged a great variety of interest groups to compete for advantage on a level playing field of political opportunity. Pluralism suggested that the state did not champion sectional interests and certainly had no motives of its own other than to promote democratic participation. The theory of pluralism appeared to be compatible with the consensus politics which ostensibly characterized American political life in the post Mc Carthy years and downplayed the role of conflict and struggle in the political process.

Merelman's fascinating book is based not only on his own experience as a graduate student at Yale during this time, but on interviews with no less than 129 faculty members and former